Council Meets to Discuss Invasive Species in California

by: Crawford Tuttle and Mike Chapel

The Council met in Sacramento on December 1, 2005 to discuss invasive species in California. The meeting was organized as a series of panels that provided the Council with an overview of invasive plants, animals, and pathogens in the state. The council then agreed to form a working group to develop ways for increasing the effectiveness of government programs for prevention, detection, and rapid response to invasive species.

Impacts to the environment, California agriculture, and the economy.

Edie Allen (Professor, UC, Riverside) and Karen Klonsky, Coop Extension Specialist, UC, Davis) described some of the impacts from invasive species. Dr. Allen explained that increasing occurrences of invasive organisms should be expected with a changing global environment. She listed a variety of environmental impact from species invasions, including reductions in overall biodiversity; competition with native species at risk; changes in soils, water, and land environments; and modified fire behavior. Dr. Klonsky then noted that invasive species are resulting in an annual state-wide loss of agricultural products worth $7-8 billion. She described the roles of the Animal and Plant Inspection Service (APHIS) in detecting, preventing, and eradicating pest species. Dr. Klonsky also describe an economic risk assessment process that is being used to help evaluate strategies for controlling invasive organisms in agriculture.

Pathways for Introduction and Early Detection/Prevention

Dr. Scott Oneto (Coop Extension UC Davis) described the pathways that are used by plants to invade new areas. Many species have been intentionally planted for horticulture, erosion control, or other human purposes. Others commonly "hitchhike" on clothing, animals, vehicles, and food products. Dr. Onoto explained that many successful invasive species have a horticultural origin. They are successful because the they are often planted in a healthy condition, are fertilized and grow fast, and are not eradicated when they invade.

Dr. Ted Grosholz (Coop Extension, UC Davis) described some of the pathways for movement of aquatic organisms. Aquatic species most commonly move to new environments through the ballast water for ships; attachment to boat hulls and fishing gear; escapement from personal aquaria, backyard ponds, and seafood operations; and intentional introductions by people. Dr. Grosholz noted that early detection and rapid response is the key to affordable control. He recommended a standing reserve fund that can be accessed when new occurrences are discovered.

Mark Stanley (CA Dept. Forestry and Fire Protection, retired) offered some recommendations for managing invasive species based on his experience with managing invasive pests such as Sudden Oak Death and Pine Pitch Canker. He recommended the formation of a standing comittee of agency representatives that can provide overall coordination for managing invasive species. Tasks groups would then be formed to manage individual organisms. Mark also listed a variety of considerations that must be met to have successful interagency working groups for invasive species.

Examples of Ongoing Agency Cooperation in Invasive Species
Nelroy Jackson (Vegetation Management Consultant, California Invasive Weed Awareness Coalition) began this discussion by describing a wide range of working groups at the state and national level who are working on invasive species. Much of the work by federal agencies is guided by a national invasive species plan. National programs for invasive species tend to address the full range of invasive species while state and local groups are often dedicated to specific taxonomic groups and environments.

Next, Larry Bezark (California Department of Food and Agriculture)
provide an overview of the new state plan for noxious and invasive weeds. Larry described some of the high-priority work in the plan and also identify a variety of ways that CBC member agencies can coordinate during the development of the state plan.

Dr. Wendy West (Coop Extension, UC Davis) finished this discussion by describing how "weed management areas" are identified and used at the local level to control invasive species.

Opportunities for New Cooperation in Managing Invasive Species
Crawford Tuttle (Deputy Secretary, California Resources Agency) opened this discussion by suggesting that the Biodiversity Council could assist with managing invasive species in California. He explained that there are considerable opportunities for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of government programs. The largest benefits may be in the coordination of prevention, detection, and rapid response work. Following a discussion by the Council, staff was directed to organize a workshop to develop methods for improving coordination among member agencies on invasive species.

Note: An interagency workshop was convened on January 19, 2006. Twenty three agencies participated in the workshop. The group met again on March 23. Work groups have been formed to: 1) improve the permitting processes associated with eradicating invasive species; and 2) develop a coordinated rapid response strategy for CBC member agencies.

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